

Testimony of Rosanna Mey  
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In support of State Legislative Commissions  
Re: The Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission Requires Additional Funding to  
Effectively Serve the Community  
March 4, 2015

Dear Co-Chairs Senator Bye and Representative Walker, and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Rosanna Mey and I am a graduate student at the University of Connecticut, pursuing my master's degree in social work with a concentration in community organizing. I am also an MSW intern with the Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission (APAAC). During my internship, I have worked on various projects addressing the needs of various Asian Pacific American (APA) communities. I would like to talk with you today as to how important APAAC's work is for the state and why the work it does is crucial for APAAC to have these two additional positions to carry out additional needs assessments of the APA communities, as well as to why it is important for APAAC to remain a separate commission for the future.

One of the biggest issues I have seen more often than not is that APAs are considered as "other" or not even included at all when it comes to statistical data on the needs of minority communities. While working on various projects for the commission, I have seen how statistical data for APAs do not match up the needs that are faced by each separate APA community. For instance, the 2015 "Healthy Connecticut 2020" Health Assessment report released by the Connecticut Department of Public Health stated in the Executive Summary that "data for specific populations, such as racial and ethnic minorities (i.e. American Indians and Asian Americans) are less readily available than indicators for the total population or nonminority groups." And to prove that point, throughout the report there would be statistics on different health issues affecting all racial groups, but there would be no statistics for APAs. Instead, there is the "other" category. We do know that the APA population is one of the fastest growing minority groups, but still, this seems like it is not enough to consider the needs of APAs and to even include them in statistical data on the needs of minority populations. It's almost like saying that the APA communities have no problems, or yet, that *they don't even exist*.

What is equally just as bad is that *if* there is data available on the needs of APAs, they are usually clumped together as "one big Asian group." To me, it's saying that the Chinese is the same as the Vietnamese, and so on. That is not true! Each Asian group is unique on its own; with its own beliefs and language that separates them from the rest. Using data to generalize all APAs having the same problems completely masks the real issues that each group is really battling with. For example, issues relating to unemployment may not be a problem with Japanese or Koreans, but it may be an issue for Filipinos or Indians. In 2014, APAAC completed a needs assessment of the Southeast Asian community (consisting of Laotians, Cambodians and Vietnamese) and found significant issues that only affect one group or the other. For instance, in terms of barriers to health care access, the Vietnamese were "more likely to spend less on food,

heat and other basic needs just to pay for medication,” while Cambodians had the greatest issue with language barriers when attempting to communicate with a physician. Overall, Laotians had the least issue with barriers to health care access. Just this one needs assessment that APAAC has conducted with the Southeast Asian community proves that the “one size fits all” theory does not apply and how extremely important this data tells us of the specific issues faced by each separate Asian community.

By clumping Asians together as one big group masks the real issues just described above. This is problematic even at the state level, but it is just unfathomable to comprehend when this is also reflected at the federal level. APAAC works tirelessly to address all the needs of each specific Asian community. With only two full-time staff and, when lucky, donated time from volunteers, APAAC is able to provide some outreach and education to our APA communities. *But, that’s just some.* Even with added assistance of APAAC’s Commissioners educating and conducting outreach, it still is not enough. There are still many APA communities out there that are in need of this commission to support them and guide them. The Southeast Asian needs assessment is proof of that need. Just imagine that need being multiplied if needs assessments were done with all of Connecticut’s APA populations.

I hope my testimony helps you to understand how important APAAC is for Connecticut’s APA communities and how significant it is for APAAC to receive two more positions to continue carrying out the work that it does for the communities. APAAC understands the needs of each separate Asian community and provides the resources that can help each community thrive, something that cannot be done if the commission were to be consolidated with other commissions in the future. It just goes back to clumping all Asian groups into “one big group” and masking the needs faced by each one, with no solution for these needs in foresight. The needs assessments of all of Connecticut’s APA communities can assist in coming up with solutions to combat the issues that are exposed. But in order for that to happen, APAAC needs those two positions to make that possible, and to set forth a better tomorrow for future generations of Connecticut’s Asian and Pacific American citizens. Thank you.

Respectfully yours,

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